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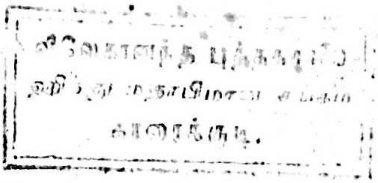
THE AWAKENING



DEMAND FOR DEVADASI LEGISLATION

IMS0721

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Presented by Kalki Krishnamurthy Academy Muruga Appa
23-10-52.

Support for Devadasi Legislation.

As a few interested individuals are trying to impress upon the Government and the public that my bill for abolishing the system of Devadases in the Hindu temples has not much support behind it and as I am naturally anxious to disillusion those interested few as well as others who may be carried away by such ill-founded statements I am forced to write these few lines.

Since the public came to know that I have given notice of a resolution and a bill in the Madras Legislative Council, I have been receiving innumerable letters of sympathy and support from individuals as well as from recognised social reform associations and other public bodies composed of both men and women. As the public is aware, the reports of the meetings of the Devadasi associations throughout the Presidency, demanding legislation to put an end to the dedication of girls to Hindu temples have been appearing in the Press of late and they have been also sent to me. I have also received memorials and petitions from reliable Devadasi associations requesting me to go on with my resolution and my bill. For the information of the public I append below a list of the associations that have supported my proposed bill.

I may also mention that many members of the Devadasi community both men and women, who demand reform have attended the recent Indian National Social Conference as delegates, have waited upon me and are anxious to undertake propaganda work throughout the Presidency if helped with funds by the enlightened public. The reformed Devadases, who have preferred a life of poverty to a life of shame and affluence and who are prepared to do propaganda work, if financed do not refute any of my statements which I have made in my speech and on the other hand they even go so far as to say that I have been very mild in the description of the real state of affairs that obtains in that community.

As for the misrepresentations and falsehoods which a few misguided Devadases who are actually in the trade and who are being profitted by such a life have been spreading through pamphlets to undo my good work, it is for the enlightened public to judge. I can only assert with all the force of my convic-

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tion and my experience of our society that my speeches and my articles have been based upon facts and are fully supported by the enlightened section of the men and women of the Devadasi community such as the members of the Kalavanthulu associations in the Andhradesa and those of the Tamil Nadu Devadasi associations.

Devadasi Women Associations.

1. *Coimbatore* Manimekala Sangam.	2-11-27. Srimathi Chowdari V. Konambal, President.
2. The Andhradesa Devadasis' Sangha Sanskarna Sabha, *Tirupathi*.	10-10-27. M.R.Ry. Vidyala Balakrishna Ayya Garu, President.
3. An appeal to abolish the dedication of girls to temples by Srimathi Padmavathi Ammal of Tinnevelly and Srimathi Ranganayaki Ammal of Koranadu.	3-11-27.
4. Conference of the members of the dancing girls caste at *Bellary*.	7-8-27. Mr. Jothi Venkataswami, President.
5. Devadasi association *Tenali* Taluq.	30-11-27. Dasari Kanakamma, President.
6. Devadasi sangam, *Repalle* Taluq.	24-11-27. Sreemathi Maddala Peda Narasamma Garu, President.
7. Meeting of the Tanjore District Devadasis at *Tiruvaduthurai*.	14-12-27. Mr. Rajaratnam Pillai, President.
8. Memorial of the representatives of the Kalavanthulu and Shengunthar-women Devadasi Srimathi Padmavathi Ammal, Saradambal, Ranganayaki Ammal and Bhadrayamma.	
9. Tinnevelly Women's Association proceedings signed by a number of Devadasi community women.	
10. Chidambaram Devadasi conference.	8-7-27. Mr. Singaram Pillai, President.
11. Madras Devadasis' meeting.	9-1-28. Serugun Vengammal, President.
12. Devadasi association, Woriur	8-1-28. Mr. M. Ramasami Pillai, President.

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Devadasi Community Men Associations.

13. Isai Vellalar Sangam, Tanjore.	16-10-27. Mr. Shanmuganandar's letter condemning the opposition.
14. Isai Vellalar Sangam at Mayavaram at the time of Gandhi's visit.	13-9-27. Mr. Lakshmana Mudaliar, President.
15. Anantapur District Kalavanthulu Reformation Society, Tadpatri.	24-8 27. Mr. Y. P. Chinthalappa Garu, President.
16. The Sengundhar Mahajana Sangam, Coimbatore.	19-7-27. Mr. N. Palaniappa Mudaliar, Secretary.
17. The Sengundhar special meeting of the Executive meeting.	20-11-27.
18. Kalavanthulu social reform association, Guntur.	24-8-27. M. R. Ry., Nyappa Hanumantha Row Garu' President.
19. Kalavanthulu association, Bapatla.	12-10-27. M,R Ry. Dasari Kasiah Garu, President.
20. „ Tenali.	8-10-27. M R. Ry. Kalava Ramachandra Bayiragi.
21. „ Repalle Taluq	28-9-27. M.R.Ry., A, Venkata Narasiah Garu, President.
22. Negapatam Isai Vellalar Sangam.	19-11-27. Mr. Shanmuganathan, Vice-president.
23. Andhradesa Kalavanthulu (Devadasi) social reform movement Gudivada.	20-11-27.
24. District Kalavanthulu association, Bellary.	7-10-27. Mr. Bhimanna. Secretary.
25. Kalavanthulu Sevasangam, Amalapuram.	30-12-27. Mr. K. Veeranna, President
26. Kalavanthulu social reform conference, Ellore.	24th & 25th Dec. Mr. Sreenivasalu, President.
27. Kalavanthulus' meeting Bapatla,	22-1-28. Mr. Maddala Subbiah Garu, President.

Men Associations in the Presidency.

28. Citizens of Tirupathi.	1-10-27. Mr. Rajagopalachariar.
29. Public meeting at Jammalamudugu, Cuddappah District.	23-9-27. Mr. P. D. Thiruvengada Mudaliar, President.
30. Public meeting at Rajampet, Cuddappah District.	25-9-27. M.R.Ry. Ambathi Ramasami Chetty Garu, President.

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31. Citizens of Kavali, Nellore District.	28-9-27. Mr. Venkatasubbiah, President.
32. Public meeting, Proddatur Cuddappah District.	12-9-27. Mr. A.K. Muni, President.
33. Public meeting at Kalahasthi.	6-10-27. Mr. Raja Venkatranga Rayanim Garu, President.
34. Public meeting at Chittoor	13-10-27.
35. Coimbatore branch of the South Indian Liberal Federation.	3-11-27. Mr. V. Arunachalam. Secretary.
36. Public meeting at Bellary.	3-11-27. Mr. Balaji Rao Garu, President.
37. Public meeting at Gudivada.	11-10-27. Mr. B. Pattabhirama Sarma President.
38. Public meeting in the Pachiappa's hall, Saiva Sidhanta Prakasa Sabha.	16 10-27. Messrs. Somasundara Mudaliar and A. Ramasami Mudaliar, Presidents.
39. Public meeting at Madras under the auspices of the South Indian Humanitarian League, the Servants of India Society Madras Temperance League and the Y.M.I.A.	16-10-27. Mr. K. R. Venkatrama Iyer President.
40. Society for the Protection of Minors, Cochin,	
41. National Christian Counci of India, Burma and Ceylon, Poona.	5-12-27.
42. Ayyampet Tanjore District Tamil Sangam.	1-12-27. Mr. K. Mahalingam Pillai.
43. The League of Non-brahmin Youth, Conjeeveram.	7-12-27. Mr, K. Veeraraghava Pillai, President.
44. Muthuraja Mahajana Sangam, Woriur, Trichinopoly	8-12-27. Mr. Maduramanikkam, Secretary.
45. Godavari District association.	3-12-27. Mr. Ramasomanjulu, President.
46. Luthern Brothers Association, Repalle Taluq, Guntur District.	11-11-27. Mr. Ramakota.
47. Non-brahmin Youth Conference, Madras.	22-10-27, Mr. Janab Mahomed Abbas KhanSahib of Mysore.
48. All India National Social Conference held at Madras Mr. K. Natarajan of Bombay President.	27th, 28th and 29th December,

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49.	Saivasidhanta Sabha, Pondichery.	
50.	Sandavadi State Subjects' Conference.	10-1-28, Mr. N. M. Joshi, President.

Social Conference. January 1928, Bombay.

Women's association in the Presidency.

51.	Public meeting under the auspices of the Indian Ladies' Samaj and the ladies branch of the Southern India Bramo Samaj.	18-8-27. Sir Sankaran Nair, President.
52.	Mayo Protest meeting organised by the women of Madras.	28-9-27. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, President.
53.	Women's Indian association.	Trichinopoly.
54.	,,	Nagpur.
55.	,,	Calicut.
56.	,,	Madura.
57.	,,	Anantapur.
58.	,,	Saidapet.
59.	,,	Alandur.
60.	,,	Rajahmundry.
61.	Women's Educational Conference.	Cocanada.
62.	Bombay Ladies' support.	
63.	Women's Indian association, Sarada Ladies' union, Indian ladies' Samaj, Triplicane.	27-7-27. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, President.
64.	Madura Women's Educational Conference.	26th November.
65.	Madras Women's Educational Conference.	3rd December.
66.	Ladies meeting at Trichy under the auspices of the Bharathi Sahodari Sangam	22-11-27. Mr. Seturatnam Iyer, M.L.C. President.
67.	Women's Day when women from all parts of India supported this bill.	29th December, Madras.
68.	Ladies meeting at Anantapur,	

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Boards & Councils

69. Union Board, Nidamangalam.	Mr. K. Nataraja Pillai Avl., President.
70. Municipal Council Anantapur.	Mr. K. Amiruddin, Vice-chairman.
71. Taluk Board, Bellary.	

I herewith attach a sample memorial presented to me in person by Devadasi women delegates of the Kalavanthulus of the Telugu and Sengunthars of the Tamil Nadus and also a letter from a member of the said community whose authenticity I have satisfied myself. I may be permitted to add that this is only one of the many such memorials, petitions and letters of requisition by the Devadasi reform associations and individuals of that community who being keenly alive to the pernicious and vicious nature of the practice are naturally anxious. to secure speedy legislation for its immediate abolition.

A MEMORIAL TO ABOLISH
THE
Dedication of Minor Girls to Temples.

The humble representation of Kalavantalu and Shengunthar women (Devadasis in Andhra desh and Tamil nadu).

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR HONOUR,

We humbly beg to submit that the practice existing in this presidency of dedicating young girls to temples and performing "Gazzela Puza" is fraught with the greatest danger to the women of this community in particular and to the society in general.

Whatever might have been the reasons for this practice in ancient times, it is now an established fact, we are sorry to confess, that the Devadasis are forced to lead an immoral life.

We are initiated at a time when we could not for ourselves discriminate the consequences of our future life and some of us are recruited from other classes for this life of ignominy. It has been our unfortunate lot to be spited by all and we bitterly experience the pangs of our miserable existence. We endure the difficulties in silence and can only curse the custom and the women who have victimised us.

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The primary reason for the dedication is the holding of inams by our community for the enjoyment of which we have to perform service in temples. When the women grow old in service, the trustees and villagers are dissatisfied with them, and to satisfy their demand, young girls are brought up for the service. We need not emphasise the necessary evils attending this practice, having ourselves been victims thereof.

We submit that it is the duty of the well-wishers of society and especially the Government to help us in our efforts of reformation and regeneration. The only remedy to root out the evil and help us is to enfranchise the service inams and grant pattas to the present holders.

We beg to draw your immediate attention to the necessity of protecting the minor girls of this community, who are daily subjected to the danger of life-long serfdom. It is our earnest desire that the innocent creatures should be saved from the clutches of people who want to make a living out of the immoral life of the girls.

We are members of the respective Associations organised for the reform and betterment of our community in Andhra and Tamil Nadu. We have already submitted memorials and petitions to the Government to help us to eradicate the evil. If any opposition is raised, it is only engineered by interested parties and we pray that it may not be taken heed of.

Finally we submit that the institution of Devadasis was a subject of condemnation by the poets and sages of India and we have the highest authority to state that there is not even one religious text to sanction this evil practice. We humbly beg to request that you will be graciously pleased to support all measures like the one of Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy conducive to the reformation of Devadasis for which act of kindness we shall as in duty bound ever pray.

We beg to remain,

PADMAVATI AMMAL

SARADAMBA

RANGANAYAKI AMMAL

BHADRAYAMMA.

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To Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Ammal,

Vice-President to the Madras Legislative Council.

MADAM,

Very recently I read your article in the Hindu of the 1st instant in regard to the Devadasi bill and I can affirm what is stated therein is nothing but real facts and it is not possible for any one to deny it. These so called Devadasis under the outward pretext of religion and custom dedicate girls to temples, but the real and inner motive is to enrich themselves by prostitution. Most of the Dasis, if they have no children of their own, stealthily purchase girls from other communities and letters of acceptance written as the Dasis pleased are often obtained pointing out therein that she had sold the child on the score of poverty and inability to grow the child.

Further, to escape the existing laws, girls are purchased in the name of some male or family woman, who happen to be their relatives or servant—women and when such cases are brought to light they escape by putting forth reason that the child is not theirs but to X.

From a baby it is brought up in such fashions that it will lead a meanest life only. Further she is induced and coaxed, that by dedication she can lead an ever lasting free life and obtain mukthi by serving God and by continuous vice, she would become wealthy like Y. Z.

I am also aware of instances wherein these girls have in the course of few years become victims of so many diseases and when she is found no longer fit for further vice, she is often ill-treated and scorned with a view that she may be finally relieved from them. In a few cases, fraction of her earned wealth is given and released by deeds of agreement and few go a step further and say that she had earned nothing and she should pay for previous maintenance. Only when she is thus deprived of her wealth and health she recollects the previous inducements and chooses death better than further existence. Still there are such sufferers, still continuing the same life, for there is no other way of living. Dasis treat girls in a better manner so long she is fit for prostitution; otherwise her fate is better known to God only.

Now I will say a few words in regard to boys of their community. Boys in most cases are not properly cared for and in such cases where girls are not in existence or few high minded Dasis educate their boys; otherwise, they are engaged for their menial works.

A few Devadasis and Pundits claim that Agamas and Kalpas admit dedication. It may be true, but Agamas and Kalpas do not admit prostitution and stealthy purchase of girls. They also state that they are apsaras in the human world. If it is so, why should they not serve God instead of prostitution. Even while attending temple procession, they adorn costly jewels and attractive clothes contrary to the religious principles.

I have not exaggerated any thing but they are real facts.

. . . . . .

As I belong to the said community, I request you to take me as a witness when a select committee is formed.

Thanking you,

I remain,
Yours faithfully,
(Sd.) P. R.

20th December.

The above facts and figures will speak by themselves whether my proposed bill command the public support or not. I need not emphasise once more that if the Government should postpone any longer, on any excuse whatsoever, such a good piece of legislation, it will not only be blamed for its inaction but will also be failing in the performance of one of the primary functions of any Government, that is helping the just and the good in their fight against evil and injustice.

MADRAS :
.....1928. } (MRS.) S. MUTHULAKSHMI REDDI,
M.B. & C.M., M.L.C.,

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